

Event on Women, Peace and Security

“Minimum standards, Harmonized Guidelines and common policies for the EU agenda”

By Brigadier General Stefano DEL COL

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I am Brigadier General Stefano DEL COL UNIFIL Sector West Commander since October 13th 2014. Let me introduce miss. Rana Rahal, Gender Affairs Officer and Advisor of Gender Integration in Military Operations in UNIFIL.

In my area of operations there are approximately 3500 soldiers and nearly 5 percent are women coming from nine different nations, in particular some of them commanding at the minimum level, in staff positions and specialized branches.

UNIFIL'S forces are impartial peacekeepers, they are deployed in South Lebanon in order to accomplish the mandate of Resolution 1701/2006. The three main pillars of the resolution are monitoring the cessation of hostilities, assisting the Lebanese armed forces and supporting the Lebanese population.

Coming to the main topic of the day, I must begin by saying that women and children are the most affected people during armed conflicts.

Therefore, there is a gender component in UNIFIL Sector West in order to facilitate the approach towards women living in Lebanon.

In order to prepare all Sector West soldiers for this theater of operations, high importance was placed on cultural awareness during the predeployment training in Italy and here in Lebanon right after our arrival because we understand that every conflict is different, every culture is unique and the intervention should take into account the status of women, be careful in addressing issues and engaging women in a culturally appropriate way, always keeping in mind the mission's mandate from 1701/2006.

Moving on, I would like to tell you what we are doing inside the headquarters. I picked up from where my predecessor left off and before putting into practice our gender capabilities, the main thing was to recreate the team. Two military gender focal points are under my direct supervision and support here in the headquarters. Regarding the maneuver Units under my command, each single battalion commander has appointed their military gender focal points which will train their Units on gender awareness.

At the end of training with UNIFIL, we foresee to have 56 focal points trained in sector west, 34% of them will be women.

We are focusing on women's empowerment, their natural capabilities and their participation in decision-making processes because they can significantly contribute to the maintenance of international peace, therefore, we are concentrating gender training towards various tasks, for example market walks, foot patrols, humanitarian assistance, mixed patrols, military checkpoints and everything that is necessary to ensure equal participation and full involvement.

In the gender context, but not only, it is also necessary to maintain good relations with the local population. One of UNIFIL's main pillar is to improve the way of life for the people of Lebanon. It maintained a close relationship in the years with the community by realizing a high number of initiatives through CIMIC activities and training programs as outlined in resolution 1325. They are great activities for ensuring that the needs and perspectives for men, women, boys and girls are met.

Some activities regarding our best practices carried out on the field, within means and capabilities, are projects for women associations and liaison for Sacra Famiglia in Tyre (which is the largest and most important city on the coast); a women cooperative was setup in Bint Jubayl (another large city in the hinterland); medical care for children at the women's society in Qana (another famous town) and female orphanage in Tibnin (the second most important city in the south); moreover, we organize many activities and projects for disabled children; another important issue that we are looking into here in Lebanon are the refugees from nearby countries and quick impact projects with intent to address some of the most pressing needs of the local population.

These were just a few examples so you can have an idea of the efforts we are putting into this matter.

If we use a gender lens, which means examining how and if being a woman or man, together with other social identity markers such as age, class, urban residence, geographical location etc., as of today I can affirm that in this theater of operations, women are playing an important role making the difference for peace-building.

In conclusion, gender is really important as an opportunity and it also enables crucial issues in areas of conflict where the population is vulnerable and where our duties are to support the local population in an equal approach guaranteeing that the different needs and concerns of both men and women are met.